(STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS ON THE WAR 10)

The Victory of the Marne

The enemy's onslaught — Order to stand firm
The battle
Immediate results — Historic consequences

by

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by
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THE VICTORY OF THE MARNE

From the 5th to the 10th September, the destiny of France and probably of the whole of western civilisation was at stake on the plains of the Marne. On a battle field nearly 200 miles in area, barring the way from Paris to Verdun against the most formidable invasion that has ever menaced France, the Nation in arms checked the invasion, and if, during that memorable week she did not completely shatter it, she at all events in some measure brought it to a standstill.

In those days, the French army, aided by a few British regiments, not only saved a country from ruin, but also rescued Europe from the formidable yoke that was threatening her. Between the river Seine and the Aisne, and between the banks of the Meuse and the suburbs of Paris, more than two million men, representing not only two nations, hereditary enemies, but two ideals, and if I may so term it two worlds, were face to face in battle array. It was not as at Jena or Sedan a matter of deciding a quarrel for which certain provinces were the prize. A question was put to France and perhaps to Germany on that memorable 4th September 1914 : *To be or not to be?* But in addition, the defeat of France meant the slavery of Europe, and her victory its deliverance.

The Battle of the Marne marks one of the most solemn hours that France has ever known, one of the five or six *moments* when from the brink of the abyss she staked all and won.

It is still much too soon. I think, to attempt to write

a history of the Battle of the Marne such as could be written of the Battles of Marengo or Waterloo. It is a good thing, however, that some of us should from now begin to collect, and put together, its main characteristics many of which naturally enough escaped the attention of most of the actors in the drama, confined as they were to their own corner of the battle-field. An eminent historian, our master, has for two years been patiently and conscientiously investigating these points and before long he will be able to reconstruct in detail, as well as in its main lines, the great tournament, the second anniversary of which, we have just been celebrating (1).

Such is not the object of this little book. I shall merely retrace the salient features of the battle as they stand out clearly to-day (until further notice) if only to hold up to admiration a beautiful piece of French workmanship, neat, clear, logical, in a word, classic, like a tragedy of Corneille or a park designed by Le Nôtre. It is necessary to make this statement now in order to establish the considerations which follow, for I intend to point out what place the Battle of the Marne will hold henceforth in the history of France rather than attempt a sketch of strategic history.

* * *

In the history of the world there are some battles (forgive me if in my desire to mark a great historic event I appear somewhat pedantic), which without necessarily displaying the greatest genius are nevertheless the most illustrious : these are what I call *battles that turn the tide.* A whole nation rises up in the face of a formidable invasion which seemed destined to engulf and entirely overthrow it. If, added to this, an entire civilisation, centuries old, is at

(1) M. Gabriel Hanotaux, in his great *History of the War in* 1914, is now touching upon the *Battle of the Frontiers.*

its back, then it is as champion of the world that this nation rises up. Had the wave passed over it, the history of the world would indeed have been changed.

This issue has been at stake six or seven times only within the last three thousand years. Marathon, for example, where Miltiades of Athens in 490 B. C. checked the apparently irresistible invasion of the Medes and Persians and saved the Hellenic world; Aix and Verceil, where, in 102 and 101 B. C. Caius Marius, proconsul of Rome, by vanquishing Teutons and Cimbri who were carrying all before them, preserved for centuries Greek and Roman civilisation from the barbarian; the Catalaunian Flats, where under Aetius in 451, the Allied armies of Gaul vanquished for ever Attila and his Huns; Poitiers, where in 732, Charles Martel, Duke of the Franks, stemmed the Islamic wave which had swept irresistibly from the heart of Arabia to the banks of the Loire; Vienna, where in 1683, Jean Sobieski stopped the advance of the Turks who, pressing forward from the plains of Asia, threatened for three centuries, first Eastern Christianity, then that of the West. These battles are great *turning point battles* in History. One day can destroy a century. A civilisation that refuses to be defeated finds under different conditions the sword of a Miltiades, of a Marius, of an Aetius, of a Charles d'Héristal, of a Jean Sobieski to save it from barbarism. One day, when we shall know the new barbarism better, from which, thanks to our effort Europe has escaped, the battle of the Marne will be placed by the world in the same category as the great moments I have mentioned.

France will realize more especially that thanks to her victory, at a moment when everything seemed lost or at least compromised, she has reconquered, owing to the mysterious quality power of her amazing vitality, (her prestige for an instant only dimmed) the right to a long life of fortune and glory. After retracing the circumstances and the

different phases of the great battle of September 1914 and showing the consequences of our victory, I shall, with the reader's consent, compare it with the momentous battles of Bouvines, Orléans, Denain, and Valmy, for the Battle of the Marne was also one of those memorable events which saved France from mortal peril.

The enemy's onslaught (1)

On the morning of September 5th 1914, the commanding officers of the French armies having checked their retreat received the following message from the Commander-in-Chief Joffre : « The moment has come for the army to advance at all costs and allow itself to be slain where it stands rather than give way. » A note from official sources issued shortly after the event adds this comment : « The disposition for attack aimed at by the order of August 25th is now completed. »

We must go back therefore to that date (25th August) in order to discover the idea that led to the manœuvre of the battle of the Marne and resulted in success.

The Commander-in-Chief had written on August 25th : « The proposed offensive movement not being possible, ulterior operations will be effected by the addition of the 4th and 5th corps of the British Army and fresh forces taken from the eastern area so as to form on our left a *mass capable of taking the offensive*, while the other armies will hold the attacks of the enemy in check for the time required. »

We must recall in a few words the situation which brought about this order.

On August 3rd Germany had declared war on us hastening thus an inevitable rupture because she thought the moment had at last come to attack us when every chance

(1) The present tense has been intentionally used in order to preserve the vivacity and movement of the French text especially as the battle of the Marne is so recent an event. (Translator's note.)

was in her favour for our speedy downfall. But, according to the already famous words of the Minister von Jagow to Sir Edward Goschen, « To act with rapidity was Germany's trump card, » or according to Bethmann-Hollweg, « France could wait, but Germany could not, » so our formidable enemies had wanted to add the element of surprise to that of numerical superiority even at the price of foul treachery towards the rights of others and towards right itself. That is why the neutral territory of Belgium was violated and invaded being the traditional route of the great Germanic invasions because the most convenient to the region round Paris. By thus shortening the road from our frontier to Paris, Germany also avoided our strongholds on the Eastern front which she thought would be easy to take in a back stroke if the defeat of the French armies and the occupation of Paris were not sufficient to end the war in a few weeks.

The German manœuvre to the north of Belgium forced the High Command to change its dispositions at the last moment. Instead of concentrating the bulk of our forces in the east, an important number were dispatched northwards. We did not give up the proposed offensive on the Vosges and on the Sarre, but it became necessary to thwart the treacherous blow on our north-eastern frontier and rush to meet the invader before he could cross that frontier. Consequently we were only able to send part of our army, to which was added somewhat tardily a British Expeditionary Corps, against the enormous German columns which, after repulsing the Belgians at Antwerp rolled like a flood upon France. Under these conditions the odds were heavy against us at the battle fought in Belgium, it would have ended in disaster had not General Joffre on August 25th deliberately put a stop to it. A new manœuvre had become necessary even at the cost of a loss of national territory, the initial manœuvre not offering sufficient chances of success.

The armies which had just been in action in Belgium must fall back before irretrievable defeat, the ranks must be reconstituted during the retreat and they must not allow themselves to be dislodged or cut off ; if possible the pursuing enemy must be repulsed and impaired and the troops ready to draw up for battle on a spot, and at an hour, chosen by our General Staff. Meanwhile, units drawn from the armies in the East were brought up to form the « new forces » spoken of by our Generalissimo. The retreating troops, by short or violent counter-attacks effected principally by their artillery, would be able to stop the advance of the enemy or anyhow delay it, (General order of August 25th) so as to permit the fresh troops, according to the arranged plan, to form up. The line thus re-made and sufficiently strong, we should turn round and deliberately attack.

Never was a movement more clearly planned or more mathematically executed. At the time when the armies which had fought in Belgium were falling back towards the region round Paris the « new forces » were forming up behind, composed of the 6th Army in the Amiens district under General Maunoury, and the 9th Army under General Foch, the one destined to prolong on our left the British Army, the other coming in the centre between the 5th and 4th Armies.

It would have been strange if the enemy had made no attempt to thwart our manœuvre. His armies pursued ours, and were held in check and sometimes repulsed by fortunate counter-attacks. But the Ist German Army, the largest of all, under the command of General von Klück, less exhausted than the others by the first weeks of battle and obedient to the orders of a chief whose energy and boldness amounted almost to rashness, precipitated its march. The British Army on our left was obliged to retire with such haste that the new 6th Army which had scarcely finished disembarking on August 28th had to rush

back to cover Paris sorely menaced. It was therefore very wise not to deliver battle already on August 28th on the Somme as had been planned at first; the desired disposition was by no means yet completed. On the 29th, after a meeting between Field-Marshal French, Commanding the British Army, and our Generalissimo, (« who was most cordial and sympathetic », wrote Sir John French,) the retreat continued with the line gradually re-formed and strengthened every day.

The time was considered all the more unpropitious because although Russia, our ally, was beginning to alarm Germany, it was only in the first week of September that the latter removed an Army Corps from the western front. So our front, having meanwhile become strengthened, Germany had slightly weakened hers, for the German General Staff deemed us lost.

* * *

To tell the truth they thought us doomed from the time the German Government planned our destruction. Anyone who has seen the documents with which the history of the campaigns of 1792 and 1806 were written, will find it somewhat curious that the Germans of 1914 express themselves in almost identical terms and with the same impudent arrogance, as did the Germans of a hundred and twenty-two and a hundred and eight years ago. The historians of Valmy and of Jena noted that their over-confidence had been for the soldiers of Frederick-William II and of Frederick-Wilhelm III a source of weakness. The historians of 1914 will note the same weakness, namely, a confidence carried to excess in the grandsons of the vanquished of Valmy and Jena. But if the blind faith placed in the invincibility of Prussia by the soldiers of 1792 and of 1806 was scarcely a justified illusion, the proud expectations of William II soldiers seem more plausible. For forty-three years

the conquerors of Sadowa and of Sedan had concentrated all their time and efforts upon the forging of the most formidable weapons that a nation ever used against her enemies. They possessed everything that science and wealth has at the disposal of war, the largest mortars and the most deadly gases, Zeppelins for war in the air, ironclads and submarines for war on the seas, every possible weapon, known or unknown, legitimate or otherwise, perfected, and in huge quantities. They had secretly accumulated a treasure for war. They thought that they possessed alone the secrets of strategy and tactics, for the rawest German captain fancied himself a past master in those arts, far more so than our greatest Generals. And above all they could depend on the iron discipline of their army and the grim patriotism of a military nation.

Can it be wondered at, that with far more reason than their ancestors of 1792 and 1806, they looked with disdain upon the miserable French Army which they thought unprepared and ignorant in the art of modern warfare, and like the nation to which it belonged, light, inconsistent, incapable of effort or tenacity, the victim of anarchy, defeated in advance through lack of discipline? I do not know whether like their fathers they dubbed us an « army of cobblers », but just as in August 1792 meetings had been arranged for in the Palais Royal, then the centre of Parisian gaiety, so in mid-september 1914 rendez-vous were made, before the end of a fortnight, in Montmartre. An officer passing through a village on the Meuse cried out to someone who repeated it to me : « To-morrow Paris ! to-morrow the Moulin-Rouge ! » It was not only the British Army that they termed « contemptible » ; when they saw the French soldiers give in at the first contact, their belief in our weakness grew. The French had undoubtedly fought bravely, they said, but it was only natural that they had to retreat before the « incomparable » German Army ; they were flying in disorder, frightened, terrified,

before the irresistible German forces, it will be easy to bring them to bay, « destroy » them, and then the entry into Paris will be more quickly made than in 1870 — in a few days « to celebrate the anniversary of Sedan » as was said in high quarters.

That was, if I may call it, the great misunderstanding between us and the German General Staff. We were following a well planned out manœuvre, they thought we were in disorderly flight, for they deemed us incapable of a strategic retreat, a methodical retirement could only be accomplished by a disciplined and « scientific » people, that is to say by the Germans alone. The French were retreating, and this was an admission of defeat, of a certain and almost accomplished defeat.

Had not the Germans been fully imbued with this idea they would never have advanced with such rashness. One day, recognising their defeat, a von der Goltz will relate the story of the Marne as a von der Goltz probably did for Jena. He will have to admit that the great error of his compatriots lay in the fact that they were certain of victory before the engagement had even begun.

* * *

Nevertheless they were advancing rapidly and on an enormous front. It was an onslaught, the invasion of the Huns in the 4th century, and that of the Allies in 1814, had been nothing compared with this formidable flood of men and artillery. The mass hurled against us consisted of about 1 500 000 men, more than a million of whom were rushing towards Paris from every side with 4 000 field guns, 450 batteries of heavy guns and 700 enormous trench mortars. The armies of von Klück and Bülow (I and II) alone hurled 520 000 Germans through the gap at the Oise on l'Ile de France, the first army, following the right bank of the Aisne, seemed to be

marching on Paris; the second, for a moment dislodged in Guise, rolled like a flood towards Laon on the Epernay road. Witnesses declare that the Germans moved forward like an enormous wave. Hausen, with the III Army, (120 000 men) had penetrated into France by the right bank of the Meuse and was marching from Rethel on to Châlons; the Duke of Wurtemberg (IV Army) whose 200 000 men were being held in check with difficulty but successfully by General Langle de Cary, was advancing from Sedan in the direction of Vitry, whilst the V Army, under the command of the Imperial Crown Prince himself, with a force of 200 000 men, after having skirted Verdun on the north, crossing the Meuse and part of Argonne, came down the valleys of Ornain and of Basse-Saulx.

They marched very rapidly imbued with the idea that it was vital for Germany to « crush France » by a swift blow before Russia could develop her full fighting strength and before England developed a taste for warfare. Soldiers' diaries bear witness to the fact that they had to march from 21 to 24 miles a day under the scorching sun of the last week in August. They reached the regions between the Aisne and the Maine, and Argonne and Ornain in a somewhat exhausted condition early in September. They amused themselves, by spreading grief and shame in the places they passed through, plundering, burning, violating, killing; the most human among them were content with the spoils of the cellar and the larder, carrying away in their knapsacks the most unlikely booty which, however, they were often obliged to leave on the roadside, and in Champagne especially they gave themselves up recklessly to that bacchanalian orgy which had coloured their earliest dreams. At the rear or in the midst of this flood of men, rolled the heavy artillery, the pride and hope of this modern horde, crushing under its heavy wheels meat that had rotted, broken treasures and empty bottles. The inhabitants of our north-eastern pro-

vinces watched them pass, they seemed part of the machinery of an enormous destroying force, stiff, and automatic in the ranks, but like wild beasts let loose when at rest, trying to revenge themselves for the torment they endured on their victim, France, yelling « *nach Paris* » in a sort of frenzied lust. For they all thought, like the officer just now, that they would go straight to the « Moulin Rouge », whereas they were to encounter, strangely magnified, the Moulin de Valmy.

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Our army, however continued to retreat, but not without difficulty at first, for crowds of terrified fugitives from the northern provinces mingling with our columns in their mournful exodus greatly encumbered them. And the grave defeat just sustained weighed heavily upon us. However order reigned once again, but we marched along with no light step for it was sad to leave French soil to the invader, yet discipline was maintained, and if a few sighs were heard there were no murmurs. « I had no skin left under my feet, » said a soldier to me later on, « but my heart alone ached at the idea we were going backwards ».

Those who were directed to make counter-attacks and local offensive movements, considered it a great privilege. General Maleterre, a year later, described in striking terms the wonderful spirit of the soldiers under his command. The enemy was often checked and repulsed, got rid of for 48 hours, and ground was thus gained towards the gaol, which, according to the incidents of the retreat, followed by our Commander-in-Chief with the utmost attention, he had determined in his mind. Thus Maunoury's troops having reached the immediate vicinity of Paris, formed a rampart against the town, while the other troops early in September crossed the rivers Aisne and Marne and methodically destroyed the bridges behind them; mean-

while, Langle de Cary's and Sarrail's divisions retreated slowly towards le Barrois. « The *splendid* retreat, » wrote Sir John French.

On August 30th von Klück was nearing Paris, he was at Chantilly, only twenty-two and a half miles distant. The great town, encouraged and comforted by Galliéni's words, which will become historic, but abandoned by the Government, awaited the barbarous hordes with outward calm, — just as in former days, Geneviève de Nanterre had calmed the people of Lutetia menaced by Attila's Huns.

But already on September 3rd it seemed as if von Klück, heading towards Meaux and Coulommiers, was turning away from Paris — for the time being. It is said that he was applying Moltke's doctrine : « Defeat and throw back the French beyond the Marne, the Yonne and the Loire, and only then march upon Paris. » Was this posthumous order necessary? Had von Klück attempted to enter the capital without fighting, it would have been a great risk — Maunoury would have barred the way and Galliéni was there behind Maunoury, what magnificent strength wasted just when it was going to be proved that the entire German Army massed together could not withstand the French Army! Of what worth would von Klück's troops have been, hampered as they were by conquest, and drunk with something that did not resemble pride, before our armies so easily victorious?

Nevertheless, von Klück pushed on towards the Marne, possessed with the idea that he would attack our left, the British Army and d'Espérey's, and enveloping it, turn the entire French Army. The manœuvre was an obvious one and imposed itself on strategy, it would have succeeded had not Maunoury been on von Klück's right flank. But, curiously enough, and most inexplicable, the German General who prided himself on his knowledge of everything seems to have ignored the existence of a

French Army on his right, or if he knew of it, he underestimated its strength and continued marching south, while Maunoury let him get encircled and spread out his own forces fan-wise from north to south, facing east.

The mistake was all the graver since von Klück, and the other German Generals, were going to encounter an army no longer in retreat, but an army which by order of its chief was ready to hold and determined to attack.

The order to stand firm

On September 1st, Joffre, quartered with his General Staff at Bar-sur-Aube, assigned the extreme limit of the retreating movement to the Seine, the Aube and the region north of Bar-le-Duc. « That line will be reached only if we are forced to move on. The attack will take place before reaching it as soon as dispositions are completed that will allow of the entire cooperation of all forces (1). » And in the orders addressed to the Commanding Officers, the General-in-Chief on the same day instructs his lieutenants very clearly as to the conditions necessary for achieving the pivoting movement on our right (2). The pivot was Verdun defended by Sarrail who with his back against the entrenched camp had orders to retreat as little as possible : de Langle de Cary was on his left, then Foch who had just moved into the line, then d'Espérey and finally Sir John French who all executed their wheeling movements with greater amplitude as they approached the advancing wing. Meanwhile, contact had been secured

(1) The resuming of the offensive was from that date absolutely decided on. All orders issued on September 2nd insist on the offensive « which I will command to be resumed in a few days », writes the Generalissimo. He adds in order nº 2. « The effectives must be as complete as possible, the units formed and the *moral* of the Army at the height of the new tasks ahead *for the approaching renewal of the offensive which will give us final success.* »

(2) Order of September 1st. « In spite of the successful tactical movements obtained by the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Armies on the Meuse and at Guise, the outflanking movement effected on the left wing of the 5th Army, insufficiently checked by the British troops and the 6th Army, forces the ensemble of our disposition to pivot on its right. As soon as the 5th Army has escaped from the enveloping movement on its left, the 3rd, 4th and 5th Armies together will resume the offensive. »

everywhere and the Army commanders are now in closer and closer touch.

From start to finish the operations were carried out with the utmost calm and method. I will mention two instances out of twenty. On August 27th, General Langle de Cary who was holding the enemy in check, very successfully asked if he could remain on his positions. « I see nothing against your remaining till to-morrow the 28th, » the Generalissimo, wisely replied « in order to consolidate your success and *shew that our withdrawal is purely strategic*, but on the 29th, everyone must be in retreat. » At the other end of the retreating line we have another proof of the same composure, this time on the part of one of Joffre's lieutenants, and, curiously enough by one of the most impetuous. The Commander-in-Chief sent him word that circumstances seemed favourable to giving battle on the 5th. After some consultation, General d'Espérey replied that he did not consider the battle should take place before the 6th. All this gives a decided impression of coolness and perspicacity. It was in this spirit on the 4th, that the Commanding Officers of the principal units were warned that the retreating movement towards the Seine would continue only « in order to execute the operations which will lead to the resuming of the offensive by the bulk of our armies ». Thus each one was able to take the necessary steps; an ideal disposition is attained; the armies are welded together and occupy favourable positions, facing the German armies, who, in the intoxication of what they consider as certain triumph, have crossed the Marne and are convinced they will carry all before them.

It is at this moment that the Generalissimo sends forth to his lieutenants his now famous message : « The hour has come to hold at all costs and allow oneself to be slain rather than give way. » — and then the celebrated order sent to the entire Army : « At the moment when a battle

on which the welfare of the country depends is about to begin, I feel it my duty to remind you that it is no longer the time to look behind. We have but one business on hand — to attack and repel the enemy. An army which can no longer advance will at all costs hold the ground it has won, and allow itself to be slain where it stands rather than give way. This is no time for faltering, and it will not be suffered. »

No faltering occurred. Everyone understood that a solemn, perhaps a decisive hour had struck. The opposing side realized it too for one of the orders sent to the German troops at the very beginning of the battle ends thus : « I expect every officer and man, notwithstanding the hard and heroic fighting of the last few days, to do his duty unswervingly and to the last breath. *Everything depends on the result of to-morrow.*

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This battle in which the destiny of France is at stake is about to be fought on soil essentially French, that of Ile-de-France, Valois, Brie, Champagne, and Barrois.

In its first phase the battle of the Ourcq, from east to west, is fought on the sunny land of Ile-de-France and historic Valois. Its boundaries are the Marne, to the confluent of the Ourcq and its many tributaries, the Ourcq de Lizy to the Ferté-Milon, and the southern edge of the forests of Villers-Cotterets and Chantilly whence rises the plateau of Multien, von Klück's artillery base for his heavy guns during a short period. It is a land of forests with parks, still green, in spite of the heat of this torrid August. The town of Meaux lies at the extreme eastern limit. To the east of the river Ourcq, rises the vast triangular plateau of Brie, a country first rich, then poor, bounded by the valleys of the Marne, the Petit-Morin and the Seine ; this is the region around Coulommiers, la Ferté-

sous-Jouarre, Montmirail and Saint-Prix. Formerly it was one vast forest, the soil has remained wooded and hilly, hence the prefix *mont* so frequently met with. Coulommiers lies in the valley, but the vast plateau that rises above the town on the south is covered with a line of heights that have always passed for excellent strategic positions. These ridges have been fought for from the epoch when lords built their *fertés* on them to the time when Napoleon struggled hard to remove them. From these heights and from the plateau, Montmirail, Vauchamps, Champaubert, Saint-Prix and Mondement rise above the clay pocket, ten miles long, called the Marshes of Saint-Gond bordered on the north by the forest of Epernay; a land famous in France's history and already reddened by French, and still more by German blood, when the Emperor rushing from the Seine to the Marne, won those memorable victories over his enemies marching upon Paris which a hundred years later the soldiers of d'Espérey and of Foch were going to commemorate.

The chalky Champagne country lies to the east on both banks of the Marne, whiter than ever under the pitiless sun of this late summer, the monotony of the plain is only broken by the pine and fir woods which under the blinding dust have assumed a greyish colour; it is in this dust that Foch's right wing and Langle de Cary's army will give battle. At Vitry, where the fighting will be very fierce, the river Saulx swelled by the Ornain, flows into the Marne. The valleys of the Saulx and Ornain are green though also somewhat dulled by the terrible white dust of Champagne; pretty villages and small towns make bright spots here and there, but to-morrow a mass of ruins, and dead, will alone remain. — From Blesmes to Revigny the valley reaches Barrois which stretches from Ligny to Saint-Mihiel; Sarrail has placed the bulk of his army on the Barrois plateau which separates the Ornain from the Aire.

The Marne is the link between these different places : from Ligny, where Sarrail has his headquarters, to the region of the Ourcq where Maunoury intends to deliver battle, flow the waters gathered by the Marne until its juncture with the Seine on the very threshold of Paris : the valley of the Marne, French above all others for it connects the great capital with the eastern frontier towns, for it stretches from the capital to Rheims where kings formerly were crowned, and leads to the Argonne rampart called by the Convention « The Thermopyles of France », to those plateaus where for three months Napoleon struggled and delivered France from the spoil of Europe. It is there that Joffre led his armies, it is there he intended they should fight. In contact with the soil where France took her existence, Frenchmen will discover in themselves superhuman strength, like Antea, the giant in the fable, who became invincible every time Hercules allowed him to embrace his Mother, the Earth. And, verily, I seem to see on September 5th, a giant suddenly returned firmly fixed with obstinate front towards the attack and elbows resting securely on the camps of Paris and Verdun.

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* *

The enormous front massed together on September 5th stretches between those two towns. The 6th army under Maunoury (1), now lies from north to south between Dammartin-en-Goele and the right bank of the Marne, and forms our extreme left, it is composed of the 7th army corps, the 45th division, the 55th and 56th reserves and three cavalry divisions. It forms an angle with the British army, three army corps strong under the command

(1) Following the custom received to-day in publications compiled by the General Staff and already adopted by M. Babin in his conscientious study published in *l'Illustration* on September 11th 1915, I will use Arabic figures for our units and Roman figures for the German units. This will avoid confusion.

of Sir John French, which occupies the region south-west of Coulommiers, between Hautefeuille and Vaudoy and is in touch on the right with the 5th army under General Franchet d'Espérey. This army extends from the north of Provins to Sézanne and is composed of the 18th, 3rd, 1st and 10th Army Corps, the 51st, 53rd and 69th reserve divisions, and a cavalry corps. The three armies together form the left wing of our army.

General Foch at the head of the 9th army is in the centre with the 9th and 11th army corps, the 42nd division, the Morocco division, the 52nd and 60th reserve divisions and the 9th cavalry division. His front runs from Sézanne to the Camp de Mailly.

This front (with a gap barely covered by a cavalry division) is prolonged by the 4th Army under the command of General de Langle de Cary who, to the south of the Ornain from Sompuis to Sermaize, offers resistance with the 17th and 12th Army Corps, the colonial troops, and the 2nd Army Corps.

The 3rd Army under Sarrail forms behind Revigny, an angle to the right of the 4th Army, for from S. W. to N. E. from Revigny to Souilly, on the evening of the 5th, the 15th, 5th, and 6th army corps (the 42nd division having been lent to the 9th Army), and the reserve divisions under the command of General Paul Durand, are facing each other (1).'

These six armies offer, from the forest of Chantilly to the forest of Souilly, a front that may be termed harmonious, for while the French-d'Espérey-Foch-de Cary line runs from west to east, slightly bulging in the centre, the two wings from left to right form with this centre two obtuse angles of almost equal size; and while Maunoury has his back to Paris, Sarrail has his back to Verdun. In fact Sarrail is not covered by Verdun alone. To the right of

(1) The 4th Army Corps was removed from Sarrail's army already on September 1st to strengthen Maunoury's line.

the great army which stretches from the Ourcq to the Meuse, the 2nd Army under General Castelnau holds the *Couronné* de Nancy and the Ist Army under General Dubail is firmly in position on the Vosges ; they keep the German armies in check in the east, thus allowing their brothers in-arms in Champagne and in Barrois to oppose the onslaught from the north. In this way the two armies in Lorraine in the valleys of the Meurthe and Moselle contribute largely to the Victory of the Marne (1).

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The German Army hurled itself without thought as to results, against the enormous hemicycle which from Maunoury's left to Sarrail's right contained the French Armies.

Von Klück's Army, it will be remembered, held the right with the II, III, IV, IX Army Corps, the IV reserve corps and the Marwitz cavalry corps. Von Klück crossed the Marne and occupied the Montherand-Esternay front on the 5th, leaving on the right bank the IV reserve corps under General von Schwerin — he deemed this support sufficient for his right flank. The Commander of the I army marches straight on Sir J. French and d'Espérey's armies apparently neglecting Maunoury — he is thus caught between the two legs of a pair of compasses that may easily close on him unless he breaks the hinge or twists off one of the legs.

Von Buelow at the head of the II Army on Klück's left makes Montmirail his headquarters. Facing d'Espérey's right and nearly all Foch's army, he occupies a front running west of Montmirail to Écury-le Repos with the VII and X Army Corps, the X reserve corps and last but

(1) The admirable attacks delivered before Nancy by General Castelnau deserve a separate study, they play a considerable part in the ensemble of the operations from August-September 1914.

not least the Guards, for if Klück's army possesses Klück a reputed strategist, von Buelow's army has the Guards whose prestige is as yet intact (1).

Hausen, with the III Army, for the greater part composed of Saxons, held the Normée-Huiron front (south-east of the marshes of Saint-Gond and west of Vitry-le-François) with the XII and XIX Army Corps and the XII reserve corps. He faces Foch's right wing and de Cary's left.

The Duke Albrecht of Wurtemberg's army has its back towards Châlons, and it occupies a slightly oblique position with regard to Hausen whose front runs north of Vitry and south of Sainte-Menehould with the VIII and XVIII Army Corps and the VIII and XVIII reserve corps.

Finally on the extreme left of the German line, the Imperial Crown Prince, whose army has the important mission of breaking the French pivot, or at least of paralysing it, lies between Bar and Verdun. Following the Meuse towards the river Ornain on both slopes of the Argonne, his VI corps reaches the region to the north of Revigny on the 5th, his VI reserve corps Passavant and Charmontois, his XIII corps Triaucourt, and his XV corps Froidos. One corps remains near Montfaucon and a reserve corps near Consenvoye; both these corps keep in touch with the others by the Aire valley, while the Crown Prince is continuing to advance on the Ornain, for if he does not reach Bar-le-Duc he will occupy Revigny at Langle de Cary's and Sarrail's weak spots.

Thus the entire enormous German Army is engaged between the two wings opened out by us. On the evening of the 5th the great danger is not even suspected. Von Klück will begin to realize it on the 6th and try to cover

(1) It is true that this crack Corps had been somewhat routed at Guise during the retreat and had previously been rather badly treated in Belgium. But it had been re-formed and its mishaps were as yet unknown. At St. Gond only, its prestige became seriously compromised.

his mistake, but the Crown Prince recognised it last of all which made his retreat perilous and particularly precipitate.

* * *

The mistake rested mainly with von Klück and was due in a measure to his misconception of the opponent and to his unbounded audacity. Galliéni had warned Joffre on the 4th of von Klück's daring advance (1), and everything since had confirmed the news received from Paris. In agreement with the Governor of the city, our Generalissimo clearly saw what steps the event immediately necessitated. He wants the battle fought on our left. Klück hopes to envelop Sir John French and d'Espérey, but it is Maunoury, disregarded by Klück, who will attempt to envelop von Klück with the help of Sir John French and d'Espérey.

The mission of the armies on the left is thus already defined on the 4th :

« 1° It is expedient to take advantage of the *foolhardy position of the Ist German Army* and hurl against it the strength of our left flank. All steps will be taken on the 5th for an attack on the 6th.

« 2° The dispositions to be completed by evening of the 5th will be as follows :

« *a*) All the available forces of the 6th Army north-east of Meaux, must be ready to cross the Ourcq between Lizy-sur-Ourcq and May-en-Multien in the direction of Château-Thierry.

« *b*) The British Army, is to occupy the Changis-Coulommiers front, to face east and be ready to attack in the direction of Montmirail.

« *c*) The 5th Army slightly narrowing its left flank is to

(1) On the 4th the Chief of the General Staff of the military Government in Paris sends word that : « according to information received the entire German Army had swung south-eastward. »

occupy the Courtacon-Esternay-Sézanne front and be ready to attack in a south-northerly direction, the 2nd cavalry corps assuring contact between the British Army and the 5th Army.

« *d*) The 9th Army is to cover the right of the 5th Army and surround the openings to the south of the marshes of Saint-Gond, part of its strength is to be centred on the plateau north of Sézanne.

« 3° The offensive will be taken by these different armies on the morning of the 6th.

« As to the 4th and 3rd armies, they will be warned on the 6th of the great attack which is about to take place on their left. In consequence, the 4th army is to cease moving southwards and must second the operations and take advantage of them by holding the enemy in check and for this purpose will get into contact with the 3rd Army which passing out to the north of Revigny, will carry on the offensive westwards... »

This is the scheme of battle, clear, simple, satisfying like one of our classical tragedies ; it will be carried out *in spite of the three violent attempts made by the enemy to thwart it.* These are the principal acts in this great drama : First, Klück, at last alive to his danger, turns round suddenly and attacks Maunoury — then, violent counter-attacks by von Buelow and Hausen's armies who attempt to throw back Foch and pierce our centre ; finally the great thrust of the two German princes on the Saulx-Ornain valley to dislodge our right wing, the whole affair ending in the precipitate retreat of the enemy, who on every side, after very sharp contests, loses the game.

The battle

The first days are more especially Maunoury's.

The latter has scarcely moved, threatening to envelop and crush the 40 000 men of Schwerin's corps, when the Prussian general, alarmed, calls for help. Von Klück, at the very moment when he engages the four-fifth's of his army against Sir John French and d'Espérey, learns that a recently formed army is menacing his left flank. With a promptitude that enhances his reputation as a strategist, he does not hesitate to abandon his plan in order to break the attack prepared against him. He turns round and faces Maunoury, certain that after having crushed him, he can turn again south and finish off Sir John French and d'Espérey.

Everything will therefore depend on Maunoury's resistance. If he is able to hold, Sir John French and d'Espérey can repulse the troops left against them and in their turn menace von Klück, not on his right, but on his left flank. And menaced he was on the third day, obliged to admit he is vanquished and beat a retreat for fear of being caught between Maunoury, French and d'Espérey.

This battle is the battle of the Ourcq. By losing it and retreating prudently, von Klück laid von Buelow's front bare and weakened the entire German front which could not be strengthened owing to Foch's violent attacks elsewhere. That is why the battle of the Ourcq has been termed the decisive factor in the victory of the Marne.

The first encounter between Maunoury and Schwerin's corps took place in Monthyon at 2 P. M. on the 5th. Mean-

while, the light cavalry, charging on Penchard, spread death there, and the soldiers of the 56th reserve division carried Marcilly and Chambry, while those of the 55th took Barcy, thanks to the deadly fire of our artillery. Already in one little corner of the battle-field, infantry, cavalry, zouaves, at the cost of cruel losses, display a courage which, read of later on, moves one to enthusiasm. It has been said that, « Barcy and Chambry became the tombs of our reserve divisions, » but tombs that already predicted the salvation of France !

We continue to advance on the 6th ; the entire IV reserve corps is thrown eastwards and seems in a bad way when the first reinforcements reach it from the south. Von Klück has begun to realize the impossibility of his position. Through lack of precise information, he had run a great risk. He immediately recalls the II and IV corps, thus uncovering part of the front facing the British army and d'Espérey, in order to meet a more pressing danger, and he places his heavy artillery between Varreddes and May-en-Multien.

The Germans cannot, however, regain their positions and by the end of the afternoon the IV reserve corps, badly shattered, falls back towards the woods of Meaux. Maunoury, on the 7th, reinforced by the 61st division sent from Paris, is advancing steadily and beginning his enveloping movement. The IV reserve corps is giving way. At this juncture, von Klück crosses the Marne again and intervenes with the bulk of his army. General Vauthier (7 th corps), is engaged in a desperate struggle at Etavigny with the II corps, and thrown back on Acy-en-Multien. The fighting everywhere is very fierce. The German artillery from Trocy shells our positions in vain, our men take and retake them time after time. — Thus the farm at Nogeon where we captured a flag, was lost and recovered three times.

Von Klück, however, seems to be averting his peril ; he

decides to take the offensive on the 8th, calling on his reserves left in the south. But our troops are determined no further ground shall be lost and the fighting on the 8th becomes more and more desperate. We advance till mid-day, but the 45th division, attacking in the Varreddes direction is repulsed by curtain fire, and the 7th corps falls back from Betz and Thury-en-Valois. Maunoury immediately sends a reinforcement of three regiments from the 61st reserve division, and elsewhere the advance continues towards Trilport and Changis. Von Klück, now fully aware of his danger and extremely anxious, is repeatedly calling up reinforcements from the south. Maunoury is also greatly reinforced by the entire 4th army corps (General Boëlle) taken from Sarrail's army and transferred rapidly to the other end of the battle-field. The action on the Ourcq turns into a huge battle. Von Klück means it to be so, and realizing now the strength of his adversary, seems to have given up all idea of an offensive beyond the Marne, for he orders all the bridges to be destroyed (1), this, he thinks, will ensure the safety of his left flank. Almost the entire bulk of his army is now massed against Maunoury.

Will the latter, in this torrid heat, be able to hold on with men who have been fighting for three days?

It is at this critical moment that Galliéni, warned of the situation by the 6th army Commander, intervenes once again. From the beginning of operations, the Military Governor of Paris has followed step by step the preparations for the battle now about to rage on the east of the great capital. His warnings and advice had been often listened to and he proved a valuable lieutenant, cool-headed, never ceasing to provide Maunoury's army with all the reinforcements at his disposal. On the 9th, acting upon his own initiative, he sent him the most precious of all in the shape of the 62nd division freshly disembarked in Paris.

(1) The order could only be partly carried out.

And so that it might from the first take part in the battle, he mobilised in a few hours the Paris taxi-cabs. These modern vehicles thus had their small share in the « miracle » and the troops transported in this manner to the Ourcq were thoroughly amused by the Governor's act. (1). Such troops would at any time have been most valuable. At the same moment, von Klück receives a message from General von Marwitz, left in the south against the British, that does not tend to reassure him.

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The British had been severely attacked on the morning of the 6th by the II corps on the Vaudoy-Hautefeuille line, whilst the IV corps pressed forward on the left. Sir John French was preparing to counter-attack when, to his surprise, the fighting calmed down and suddenly ceased. It was at this moment that von Klück, realizing the danger of his position in the north, sent for reinforcements. The British could make nothing of it. In classical fashion, Von Klück then covers the sudden retreat of his 80 000 men by the incessant noise of artillery and a great display of cavalry. The British hesitate about moving northwards; they allow the IV corps to cross the Petit-Morin and only decide towards evening to push their advance-guard in the direction of Villiers-sur-Morin-Choisy. Sir John French's infantry becomes bolder and bolder, advancing rapidly it dislodges the enemy and holds the heights occupied that very morning by the German artillery. Marwitz's cavalry continues to cover the retreating German corps so that they are able to re-cross the Marne on the 7th. The British however, move beyond Coulommiers and on the

(1) The number of these valiant little cabs has been strangely exaggerated, 9 000 have been mentioned, but in reality only one thousand were used. As was explained to me by someone who organised the affair, both chauffeurs and *taxis* yielded such a return that it explains the temptation to increase them tenfold.

8th, having received intelligence from their airmen concerning von Klück's right wing, which had re-crossed the Marne and was blocking the way, they destroy the bridges, notably at la Ferté-sous-Jouarre while the infantry of the 3rd corps quickens its march. The British infantry now succeeds in dislodging the enemy between St. Cyr and La Trétoire after stubborn resistance. The whole of Sir John French's army has forced the Petit-Morin and is pressing hard on the II cavalry division which, unable to halt as it had hoped, is continuing its retreat. Encouraged by this, the British advance faster and faster, they cross the Marne between Luzancy and Nogent-l'Artaud ; there where the bridges had been blown up by the enemy, their engineers throw over pontoon bridges, they only succeed in securing the passage of the river at Varreddes under enemy fire after having thrown across with true British tenacity, 17 bridges, unfortunately part of the army was delayed in crossing. Marwitz now completely realizes that the danger is deepening on von Klück's left. A detachment of English soldiers is hurled against two German squadrons « piercing through », in Sir John French's words : « with the ease of a penknife through packing paper. » The German cavalry are now in full retreat ; d'Espérey, on Sir John French's right, is advancing quicker and quicker thus adding to the envelopping movement which is growing more and more dangerous for von Klück.

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At daybreak on the 6th, General d'Espérey fights his way in the direction of Montmirail, struggling against heavy odds, but supported on the left by Conneau's cavalry corps and on the right by part of the 9th Army. The German forces are very considerable early in the day, and every nerve is strained to check the advance of the 5th Army, (von Klück's left wing, 2 army corps,

2 cavalry corps and 2 of von Buelow's army corps). The fighting is very fierce, the enemy holding the line from Montmirail, and the X reserve corps come down from this height through the woodlands of Gault, hoping to drive a wedge between the 5th and 9th armies while the whole day long our 1st corps on d'Espérey's right is struggling against the stubborn resistance of the enemy at Châtillon-sur-Morin. By a daring move, however, a division of this corps manages to turn the enemy at the wood of La Noue and passing out to the right takes the positions before Esternay in flank. The village is now ours and the enemy's advance checked near Gault.

D'Espérey was preparing to continue the struggle the next morning (7th) when air reconnaissances showed that the enemy troops were retreating. Not only was von Klück's army retiring in a north-easterly direction but von Buelow's right was also falling back. However, important cavalry corps supported by infantry detachments and very active artillery, continued to oppose the advance of the 5th Army.

D'Espérey, undaunted, moves on towards Montmirail; but at the moment when the action becomes general he learns that the left wing of the 9th army is being attacked in force. The enemy were attempting that piercing movement of our centre which I will refer to later on. D'Espérey places the 10th corps on his right to reinforce his neighbour and in spite of fierce opposition, this corps, helped by the 1st, gains ground and by the end of the day reaches Charleville and La Rue Lecomte.

The 3rd and 18th corps press closely on the heels of the Germans within sight of Montmirail where troops from the II corps try to dislodge us under a regular *Trommelfeuer* of the German artillery. The 3rd corps with General Hache have the honour of carrying the famous position and occupying it on the 8th. After a fierce struggle lasting over eight hours the whole plateau is strewn with German

dead (7 000) and abandoned by the enemy. On the other hand the Ist corps scales the plateau of Vauchamps where the village, no less illustrious than Montmirail, is in flames.

General d'Espérey is now in possession of Montmirail. von Buelow's headquarters only the night before, and he thus commands the situation. He sends his left flank (Maudhuy's 18th corps) towards the plateau of Brie and the woods of Condé, in fact towards the Marne which is reached at Château-Thierry by the 18th corps, and at Jaulgonne by the 3rd corps, whereas the 1st corps advances rapidly along the plateau of Vauchamps and the 10th corps supports General Foch.

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D'Espérey advancing from Montmirail routs the enemy as he goes and comes into touch with Sir John French's army also in pursuit of the enemy — thus both armies reach and cross the Marne. Von Klück is now directly menaced on his flank, while Maunoury, who has received reinforcements continues to oppose him. It can be easily understood that the 1st German Army Commander spurred on by the anger surging against him at Imperial Head Quarters made fierce efforts to reduce his adversary. The issue of the battle perhaps depended on this moment.

Von Klück at the same time tries to outflank Maunoury in the north at Nanteuil and to throw him back south towards Etrépilly.

The IV corps is hurled from Betz to Nanteuil and encounters our 4th corps which had arrived on the battlefield on the preceding evening. The struggle is fierce, bloody and desperate. Nanteuil is evacuated, General Boëlle orders the defending troops to fall back while the enemy occupies Droiselles and menaces Silly-le-Long from Montigny-Sainte-Félicité. Boëlle's corps is in danger of being turned. It is a dramatic moment — everywhere else

the German effort is broken, Etrépilly, heavily bombarded still holds, but the danger for us lies at Nanteuil and it would seem that von Klück has discovered the weak spot in our armour. Are we in our *extremis* going to be turned? Maunoury sends word to Boëlle that he is not to move a step backwards but on the contrary to advance, *and if necessary be slain where he stands;* the latter had not waited for this order to re-form his corps and face the enemy, already the 1st battalion of the 103rd supported by two batteries, holds the enemy behind Nanteuil in a kind of fierce rage. General Boëlle advances, certain of being cut to pieces and finds himself before a faltering enemy. Von Klück was beating a retreat.

For Marwitz's warnings had become pressing. « He could no longer withstand the combined Franco-British attacks, » Sir John French and d'Espérey would in a few hours thrust him on von Klück for whom the position had become so dangerous that no further hesitation was possible. The German High Command, we have proof of it to-day, already knew then that the game was up. The Emperor abandoning France, had gone to Luxembourg; on every hand von Klück's mistake aroused the fiercest anger.

« With a heavy heart », says a German account, « he gave the order for a general retreat northwards ». He and his many thousand soldiers were vanquished and so as to avoid imminent and terrible disaster, this General, who had the greatest reputation for strategy in the German army, fell back defeated to the north. From every side, mournfully, German columns are pouring forth; some in bad array having suffered heavily and all now experiencing a fatigue not felt the day before when they hoped to carry all before them. No more cries of *Nach Paris*, but everywhere stupefying silence. They were unable to pick up their wounded or bury their dead for they had to give way as they went. The earth was strewn with dead. To quote one instance : The Magdeburg regiment was torn

almost to shreds in a desperate struggle near d'Acy-en-Multien.

Maunoury helps to clear up the field; he sends from right to left wing, the necessary reinforcements to dislodge the German detachments from Nanteuil. He presses closely on the rear of the retiring columns, following both banks of the Ourcq, whilst the Germans retreat hastily towards the forest of Villers-Cotterets, whence they are obliged to push on towards Soissons the next day.

Already on the 10th, Maunoury issued the now famous order to his men : « Comrades, our Generalissimo asked you in the name of your country to do more than your duty — you have replied in a way surpassing anything deemed possible... If I have been of use, I have been rewarded by the greatest honour that could be conferred on me during my long career, namely that of commanding men such as you... »

For the 6th army, after having forced von Klück to abruptly abandon his offensive against the British and the 5th army, had in this way attracted the attention of the greater bulk of the powerful German army and for four days offered a firm front to a formidable attack — finally, helped by the menacing advance of the Armies of the Marne, it forced the « incomparable » army and its eminent chief to beat a hasty retreat in order to avoid utter ruin.

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Such an event was of considerable influence on the issue of the great battle. But its effects on the armies in the centre and on the right were not felt till much later. It was only after fierce fighting, when the Germans at last realised that they had failed to throw back the line, that they decided to retreat. The « bulging » movement directed by von Klück against Maunoury had been strongly felt on the British front, and in a lesser degree on the 5th army

front, but very slightly and only later on Foch's army, for the 9th army, supported by d'Espérey who followed closely on the enemy's heels, was able to push forward freely.

The General commanding the 9th army pitched his headquarters, at day-break on the 6th, at Pleurs ; from left to right the 42nd division and the Morocco division held the Villeneuve-lès-Charleville-Mondement-Saint-Prix line, the 9th corps held the region around Fère-Champenoise with its van-guards to the north of the Marshes of Saint-Gond, the 11th corps held the region Semoine-Sommesous, and the 9th cavalry division remained in reserve at the Camp de Mailly. The orders were to support the right wing of the 5th army, which was threatened on September 5th with an even greater attack for the morrow than that reserved for the 9th army. The 42nd division and the Morocco division were therefore to attack in the direction of Vauchamps, while the 9th corps would content itself with consolidating its positions on the line of the marshes in order to be ready to pass out at Champaubert ; the 11th corps had orders to fix itself on the line Morains-le-Petit-Lenharrée.

But on the 6th the formidable strength of the opponent is already realized by the 9th army ; the two divisions on the left organise their defences on the heights ; the 9th corps severely attacked is unable to maintain its van-guards to the north of the marshes, and towards evening the 11th corps is obliged to dislodge. The X German corps takes Saint-Prix on our left, the Prussian Guards drive the French from the marshes and fix their defences there, and the XII corps tries to take advantage, on Foch's right, of the evacuated bombarded villages.

The German attack became fiercer on the 7th, especially on our left, where the 42nd division and the Morocco division had great difficulty in holding their positions. General Foch remained calm, he kept on repeating. « If they are

trying to throw us back with such fury, that means things are going badly for them elsewhere and they are seeking compensation. » He concluded that the best way was to hold on with the greatest possible energy.

But on the 8th, the German attack grows fiercer than ever. The 42nd division supported by d'Espérey's right, manages to re-take Saint-Prix, but the 9th corps can only just hold on and the 11th is struggling against the repeated assaults of the Guards and has to fall back. General Foch is forced to move his headquarters from Pleurs to Plancy further south.

On the next morning, September, 9th, the situation is extremely critical. The enemy obviously aimed at taking the higher ground which, with the marshes, separates the Petit-Morin valley from the plain of the Aube. Had our line been forced back on the Aube, the results would have been incalculable, probably obliging d'Espérey, who was advancing north, to fall back and exposing de Langle de Cary who continued to hold on desperately in the valley of the Saulx and Ornain. That is why the struggle for Saint-Prix was so fierce ; during the first four days of the battle it was taken and retaken five times, so was the Castle of Mondement, which, according to a witness attached to General Humbert who commanded the Morocco division, was lost, retaken, lost and retaken again and again. The 10th corps of the 5th army came to the help of the 9th army on the morning of September 9th, but in vain, the Prussian Guards intending to keep up their reputation hurl themselves on Fère-Champenoise, our line gives way under the assault : Fère-Champenoise is lost. General Foch shows no discouragement, Fère is lost, but Fère will be re-captured. « The situation is excellent », he writes on the 9th. Excellent ! what faith there is in such optimism ! and he adds : « I command that the offensive be resumed. »

In truth, such optimism was not only on the surface. With his quick eye the Commander of the 9th army had

just perceived a break in the German line. Von Buelow, influenced by von Klück, had to his great disappointment been forced to fall back in this manœuvre, and as happens sometimes in improvised retrograde movements, a gap occurred between Hausen and himself. Foch in his turn, thought of driving, a wedge into the weak spot.

The first thing was to reconstitute our line. The 42nd division attack, and carry Fère-Champenoise. Then Mondement becomes the centre of a deadly struggle. General Humbert has butted himself against it. This old castle, torn by our shells, and the enemy's, becomes for a moment the centre of the battle. « Forward, boys, » cries Colonel Lestoquoi, to his men who are storming for the third time; « and we shall succeed. » And we did succeed. General Humbert once again took up his post of observation in the old tower, now a mass of ruins, while 3 000 German corpses strewed the avenue of the park.

« One last effort and we shall succeed! » General Foch might have used Colonel Lestoquoi's cheering words to his entire army. The high ground above the marshes is now ours, the enemy is giving way, the valley is open to us and we rush through it.

The marshes are not what legend (for there is already a legend of the Marne) has made of them. No one stuck in the quagmire for during those months such a thing would be impossible. After a very hot summer and in spite of slight rains, they were like a dry river-bed in which among the grey cracked earth grew reeds and grasses. But the Prussian Guard are forced to fight here exposed to our artillery and though they do not actually *stick* there as romantic writers have described, they suffer heavily from our deadly fire. Eight thousand fall under the guns brought hastily into position on the higher ground wrested only the evening before from the Germans, while Foch pushes on his victorious divisions against these exposed German detachments.

By the evening of the 10th, he held the marshes, and thanks to the energy with which he had transformed his difficult defensive movement into a victorious offensive, the troops advanced northwards and at a blow carried the line Vertus-Vatry. Foch took up his headquarters in La Fère-Champenoise, occupied a few hours previously by the Prussian Guard, wh o gorged themselves and drank to the certain destruction of the French army. « Let the troops eat the bread made for the enemy, » wrote Napoleon to Murat, « that bread will taste better to them than cake. » Our soldiers not only found bread baked by the enemy, but thousands of empty bottles, the sight of which made them smile and explained certain shortcomings. Many drunken soldiers belonging to the Guard and other corps, the victims of champagne, were taken prisoner that day.

However, d'Espérey's 10th corps which so valiantly supported Foch continues on the 9th its victorious forward march towards Vauchamps, Baye, and Champaubert. General d'Espérey congratulates his troops in an enthusiastic army order in which he evokes « the memorable fields which a century ago witnessed the victories of our ancestors over Blücher's Prussians and where the soldiers of the third Republic forced the retreat of the most renowned army corps of old Prussia. » From La Fère-Champenoise, facing the marshes, where fell a century ago to the cries of « Long live the Emperor », Pachtod's valiant soldiers (1), General Foch could have echoed that order which showed such legitimate pride. From the heights that Marmont had been unable to hold, he had just witnessed the foundering of the Imperial Prussian Guard and seen in this retreat of drunken soldiers, not only the loss of Germany's blood, but of her honour.

(1) The Marie-Louise.

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With the 4th army supporting his right, and the 5th army his left, Foch was able to face a situation which for a time was extremely critical.

While Maunoury on the Ourcq was making a « bulge » and the armies of Sir John French and d'Espérey threatening to envelop von Klück, so contributed to his retreat, d'Espérey's right wing seconded the valiant 9th army which repulsed the great piercing movement attempted against our centre. The two armies on the right meanwhile fulfilled their mission which was to protect the « pivot » by hurling the enemy back from the triangle formed by the heights of Verdun, Bar and Vitry.

De Langle de Cary's and Sarrail's troops were prepared « morally » for victory inasmuch as frequent successes during their retreat had encouraged them. But these triumphant counter-attacks had been extremely fatiguing. A general is reported to have said : « We won the day with men dazed by fatigue. » As an example of this : the 12th corps, with whom for a fortnight General Roques had gained repeated successes, is now composed of only six battalions fit to take part immediately in an offensive.

The 5th and 4th armies reach the line Humbeauville-Maurupt. Brienne is their headquarters. Sarrail is stationed at Ligny-en-Barrois, his left wing lies to the east of Revigny, his centre covers Bar on the heights between the Ornain and the Aire, and his right wing covers Verdun on the plateau between the Aire and the Meuse. The two armies form an obtuse angle to the back of Revigny, and menace the front and the left flank of the two German armies coming down from the Ardennes and Argonne.

However, the Duke of Wurtemberg and the Imperial Crown Prince do not in the least mean to let themselves be menaced but rather intend to menace in their turn.

If they manage to pierce through between Vitry and Bar, Saint-Dizier would be in danger, the French right wing turned, and Verdun, the pivot of our movement paralysed, cut off and perhaps captured. Already on the 6th, the 2nd corps to the right of the 4th army and the connecting link between the two armies is violently attacked at Sermaize, the line holds however. But on the 7th, the enemy strikes again even more desperately, and still on the right of the 4th army, and this time succeeds. Sermaize is taken and Pargny-sur-Saulx stormed. The 2nd corps retreating calls for help. Sarrail immediately sends forward a brigade of the 15th corps which menaces the advancing enemy on its flank while the bulk of the corps moves on towards Contrisson and the 5th corps gives battle beyond Laimont.

The left of the 4th army now seems in danger. The Saxons (XIX corps) compel our 17th corps to give way a little after fierce fighting, in which Colonel Breton's battalions cover themselves with glory. But our reinforcements are assured for the morrow, the 21st corps from the Vosges disembarks to the rear of de Langle de Cary's forces.

On the evening of the 8th the situation is extremely critical. But the enemy has to deal with the « tenacious 4th army » and no one will admit of being beaten. On the contrary it is intended that the ground lost shall be regained on the morrow. A tremendous effort is made, on both sides, and the J.-B. Dumas corps (17), supported by a division of the 21st holds the line on the 9th. The Saxons defend their position furiously at Sompuis, but finally falter before our attack and give way. Our artillery plays havoc among them, they retreat in great disorder, and whilst the centre of the 4th army holds its positions, the 2nd corps on the right resumes the offensive pushing on towards Andernay and Sermaize still supported by Sarrail's two army corps pressing heavily on the German front near Contrisson-Mogneville.

The situation seems saved. At this hour, on the banks of the Ourcq, the lower Marne and Foch's front, in spite of fierce fighting, the battle is turning in our favour, but is still in full swing on the banks of the Saulx and the Ornain. De Langle de Cary, however, is beginning to feel the effects of the retreat of the German right wing. The Saxons who had fortified Vitry are obliged to abandon the place. Langle de Cary's soldiers press closely on their heels harassing the enemy who crosses to the other side of the Marne. Vitry is in our hands and already the 21st and 17th corps are pushing nort-east and threatening to envelop the Duke of Wurtemberg's forces. The enemy, on the point of being turned, is obliged to retreat and is followed by the other troops stationed between Revigny and Triaucourt.

In accordance with their former exploits, they set fire to the villages and towns. A recent enquiry has enabled me to collect thoroughly reliable evidence of their crimes, I have handled the incendiary bombs that were picked up, seen the rags soaked in paraffin-oil which were thrown into the houses, and the carbonised ruins so unlike those caused by shells. Oh! ye ruins of Sermaize, of Saint-Lumier, Maurupt, Contrisson, Revigny, of ten other villages, what cries rise up from you against Germanic « culture! » But the honour of two defeated Princes had to be avenged. From the top of the southern hills « a very curtain of flames met our gaze », said an artilleryman to me, « during the night of the 9-10th we saw 17 villages burning. »

For on the 10th, the Imperial Crown Prince was obliged to relinquish his great dream. Sarrail had shaken his army and was pushing it to the north of Verdun.

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But with what confidence in his own powers had the Crown Prince attacked! Bearing down in the neighbourhood of Revigny, he intended to seize the bridges of the Ornain

as far as Bar and enter the little ducal town in a few hours. It is reported that on the 6th, an officer informed an inhabitant of Vaubecourt that « To-morrow we shall burn Poincaré's town. » And in fact the XVI corps intended to occupy, if not destroy Bar, while the IV cavalry corps, no doubts being entertained as to victory, would move south, towards Saint-Dizier, Langres, and la Bourgogne.

The attack on the 6th was so severe that our 5th corps retired from Laheycourt on Laimont, and Revigny fell into the hands of the XVI German corps which could now train its guns on to our left flank. We received orders to hold in spite of everything between Laimont and Laheycourt. Alternate successes and reverses take place the whole day long (7th) on the line Revigny-Montfaucon where the two armies face each other, and in spite of the struggle on the Ornain and the Aire, the 72nd division sent from Verdun by General de Coutanceau, Governor of the town, threatens the Crown Prince's communications in the north, in the valley of la Couzance.

A far greater danger threatens Sarrail's flank; the last incident in the huge battle. German forces are reported to be massing near Woevre and preparing to attack Saint-Mihiel. This is very serious news for if the Germans should succeed in piercing through to Saint-Mihiel and cross the Meuse there, Verdun would be cut off from the 3rd army and the latter would be turned. Once again our pivot is threatened. The danger does not, however, divert the Commander of the 3rd army from his first duty; at day-break on the 8th, he sends forward troops who dislodge the German corps from the valley of the Ornain and push them on to Vassincourt, Villers-aux-Vents, Triaucourt, while the 6th artillery corps crushes the XV corps at Aire. The menace is however increasing on the Heights of the Meuse, the enemy glides towards Saint-Mihiel; at 1 P. M. he has begun to bombard fort Troyon. In the meantime, General Sarrail, in order to protect his right flank gives

the order to destroy the bridges at Saint-Mihiel. This, though it did not paralyse the attack of the 3rd army, made things harder. The repulse, on the 9th, of the enemy's advance on every side had to suffice for the time being. The situation becomes worse in the rear, after Troyon, Génicourt is bombarded, and the guns at Troyon now seem silent. General Coutanceau, who has just sent an urgent appeal to the 2nd army (under Castelnau) telegraphs to the Commander of the fort : « General situation of our armies excellent. It is of consequence that the fall of Troyon should not open a way to the Germans. *Hold indefinitely* (1). » But the German columns continue to advance on Saint-Mihiel. On the 10th Sarrail's army holds the whole day through, the battle rages and spreads destruction among the enemy (7 000 casualties) from Revigny to Vaubécourt. The situation is extremely critical, a defeat in the Saint-Mihiel direction may jeopardize everything at a moment when things are turning in our favour from the Ourcq to the Ornain.

No faltering however occurred. Troyon shelled, and half in ruins, repels the attack, the enemy is unable to cross the Meuse ; General Castelnau sends the 73rd division and the 2nd cavalry division, detached from the 2nd army, to support the threatened forts which in their turn menace the assailant. On the 11th, the German cannon suddenly ceases firing. « The calm was impressive », said an officer. For the Crown Prince has just been informed that the German armies, defeated on the Ourcq and thrown back on the Marne, are beating a retreat. Even he wavers now. Sarrail pushes forward his offensive, the 5th corps captures

(1) A special study might be made of the part played by Verdun in the Battle of the Marne. Verdun's garrison intervened actively on Sarrail's right, the 72nd division under General Heymann harassed and held back the German columns while General de Morlaincourt, supporting General Coutanceau, attacked in the direction of Dombasle. During the bombardment of fort Troyon, General Coutanceau sustained the defenders courage with pressing messages and, as we shall see, called General Castelnau, Commander of the 2nd army, to the rescue.

Laimont and Villotte, while on his left, the 15th corps advances beyond the *Marne au Rhin* canal. The 6th corps and the reserve divisions on our right, try to take part in this forward movement in spite of the German howitzers covering the Prince's retreat. By the end of the day, the 15th corps has occupied Rancourt and Revigny, and has advanced to Brabant-le-Roi, making enormous captures of light and heavy artillery taken from the XVI corps in retreat. Our 6th corps meets with fierce opposition from the XVI corps south-west of Souilly. The Germans attempt one last bombardment of Troyon : the fort stands firm. All is over... defeated all along the line, the enemy is unable to play his trump card at Saint-Mihiel. Our pivot has held and we are saved. The enemy owns himself vanquished on every side, for his retreat becomes more and more marked and so rapid that in certain places it looks very like flight. It is a formal admission at any rate of defeat.

Immediate consequences

If it had been given to anyone on September 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th to take in at a glance the enormous field where the most important battle in history had just been fought, he would have seen the French army advancing like a huge scythe the handle resting on Verdun from the woods of Souilly (south of Verdun) to the forest of Compiègne, north of Paris. From right to left, our line is pressing forward on the heels of the retreating enemy. Maunoury has already reached the neighbourhood of Compiègne and Soissons. Sir John French is driving his divisions in the direction of Neuilly-Saint-Front and la Fère-en-Tardenois which he occupies in the evening on the 10th ; d'Espérey throws the German rearguard back from la Brie to the Marne, crosses the rivers Marne and Aisne and hurls his 18th corps on to the plateau of Craonne ; on the 13th September, at mid-day, at the head of part of the Ist corps, he makes a triumphal entry into reconquered Rheims. Foch, pushing aside the last obstacles in his path, enters Châlons, his troops take possession of the camp, while the 4th army having swept the defences at Vitry has also crossed the Marne on bridges which the enemy in his retreat has not had time to destroy and advances on Saint-Menehould. The Crown Prince, after being harassed for three days by Sarrail at Laimont, Revigny, La Vaulx-Marie, Vaubecourt, seems overcome by panic and retreats precipitately. He abandons the line Villers-aux-Vents-Rembercourt, then the line Dammartin-sur-Yère-Triaucourt, he even abandons the precious line Clermont-Sainte-Menehould

where the railway runs from Châlons to Verdun. He abandons the greater and the most important part of Argonne, and after retreating from 25 to 30 miles, only stops at the line Vienne-Montfaucon-Spincourt, to the north of Verdun. This was the breaking up, the crumbling to piéces of all his ambitious plans, Verdun, and Paris ! The heir to the imperial throne must have cut a melancholy figure as he crossed, once again, the battle field of Valmy ! History repeats itself, and Gœthe himself would have been intensely interested in such problems.

The reality of their victory was being felt every where by the French soldiers ; mountains of German corpses, quantities of unused shells and abandoned guns, thousands of broken rifles met their gaze. But what struck them most were the innumerable empty bottles of every vintage, especially of champagne, witnesses of the great Bacchanalian orgy indulged in when certain of victory, and as prelude to battle, by the highest staff-officers as well as humblest private. Sometimes our men discovered groups of Germans in the cellars more paralysed with drink than with fear. But their hearts sank when they passed through villages destroyed by shells or more often by the base vengeance of the vanquished, sometimes the corpses of sacrificed civilians were still warm, if the soldiers did not arrive in time — as at Coulommiers — to rescue the hostages.

Though thrilled with the pride of victory they moved on « dazed by fatigue », for during those terrible weeks since the order to retreat, many had scarcely had time to eat or sleep, they fought as they fell back, fought as they held, fought as they advanced and thwarted destiny by the greatest effort of endurance and courage that has ever been given an army on such a huge scale to put forth.

Thus ended the battle of the Marne, a glorious victory won by the French Army.

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The victory of the Marne has grown in the estimation of men, and amazed us more and more as during the last two years we have realized the enormous strength of the enemy, the multiplicity of means at his command, the fierceness of the attack, and the tenacity of the defense.

I have already described this strength on the eve of the battle of the Marne. The German Army seemed then, with its massed effectives and its formidable advance, like one of nature's forces let loose and impossible to check, besides this its onrush was guided and directed, and therefore a hundred times more formidable. Every element of success seemed to be there, yet from the 5th to the 10th September, something evidently superior in force rose up against it, and since the obstacle could not be removed, retreat became inevitable.

That something was first of all the calm determination of a great chief, ably seconded by a staff at headquarters who had worked hard, though with less ostentation than the adversary's.

Napoleon said : « *The greatest quality in a Commander in Chief is to keep cool-headed.* » The French Generalissimo possessed this quality to perfection. On the 24th August 1914, at a very critical hour, he had grasped the situation brought about by defeat, and the necessary measures to be taken. He accepted all the consequences of the situation with that strength of heart which generally accompanies a « cool-head » — even the hardest one of all — the momentary abandoning of part of the soil of France to the barbarian. He put a stop to the frontier battles at the moment when defeat might have turned into disaster, and of his own free will transferred the battle rearwards : for the battle of the Marne is no other than the battle in Belgium resumed under better conditions. The retreat was con-

ceived and executed in such a way that the two battles are in reality one. General Joffre tried to obtain on the Seine and the Aisne, the victory he had not won on the Somme and the Meuse.

M. G. Hanotaux describes this as a « fine intellectual operation » that might be called *a battle transfer.*

The Commander-in-Chief was far too wise to narrow himself down to any definite plan, he had not on the 25th August absolutely fixed the Seine as the limit of our retreat; he certainly intended to give battle on the Somme, on the Aisne, perhaps even as far as the Seine, and not on the Marne. He had decided however on one thing and that was not to fight till all the conditions necessary to victory were created, for he knew that the fate of his country depended on the issue, and he was determined not to suffer defeat. In order to seize the right moment at any possible time, he never for an instant lost sight of his battalions on that immense front which stretched from Artois to Alsace. Some battalions retreated in good order fighting as they went and thus holding the enemy in check, others were transferred from the armies to which they belonged and placed elsewhere at given hours.

I have read the army orders. They bear witness to the fact that the French High command played all along a cautious game never losing sight of the enemy's movements. I have quoted some of these orders which show that the events which occurred were thought out beforehand, and if events planned ahead could thus take place it is because from August 25th to September 10th one hand alone controlled the Army, a hand that never trembled even in the worst moments, because the head remained « cool ».

This was the first cause of victory. The second was the spirit of initiative displayed by Joffre's officers in command. I have always admired and have described elsewhere, how

in 1806 Napoleon, contrary to legend, after Jena and Berlin, could on the morrow of a great battle when his marshals were in pursuit of the enemy direct them from afar without inconveniencing their moves. Lannes, Murat, Soult, Bernadotte, Ney, received his orders but were never hampered by them, and it was by this method that the twofold defeat of the Prussian Army at Jena and at Auerstadt turned into an immense victory extending from the mountains of Saxony to the Baltic.

His Generals acted according to the resources of their military genius within a large circle traced by the Emperor. In the same degree Joffre gave full power to Galliéni, Maunoury, French, d'Espérey, Foch, Langle de Cary, Sarrail, Castelnau and Dubail.

I will not have the impertinence to award them prizes. The reader will have seen what each one did : how Maunoury, gave the first blow thereby attracting the greater bulk of Klück's forces, how he held them in check and thus upset the German plan and all their hopes; how Sir J. French stood his ground on the first day and realizing, though somewhat tardily, how to turn to account Maunoury's prodigious effort, attacked for three whole days; how Franchet d'Espérey communicated his ardent nature to his troops hurling them on to Montmirail whence the shade of the Emperor beckoned to him and menacing the already greatly shaken German army accelerated its retreat; how Foch, on the same famous battle-fields, with a determination that nothing could shake and an imperturbable composure inspiring both confidence and ardour, withstood a violent effort on the part of the enemy and soon forced him back; how Langle de Cary and Sarrail standing their ground with wings extended, covered the German Princes from Vitry to Verdun without faltering, and so saved the cornerstone upon which the battle hung.

The beautiful thing about it was that each one acting for the best in his own sector of the battle, at the same time,

worked for the common good. This is worth noting because it was not, alas! always the case with the great soldiers of the past, nor according to certain witnesses was it so with our adversary. Joffre telegraphed on September Ist : « Army Commanders must constantly communicate their plans and movements to one another. » They did even more for these soldiers manifested, with rare intelligence, a marvellous steadfastness — already united in their beliefs, they were also knit together through their disinterested love of country. Thus victories are won.

To judge them as a whole I shall stand by the opinion of that excellent foreign soldier who saw them fight : « Your Generals, » cried Sir John French, « are *damned good soldiers!* » His judgement is brief but to the point.

And then besides those « damned good soldiers » there were other « damned good soldiers » behind.

> The youth, the obscure, the rank and file,
> we who were marching crippled, wounded, bedraggled, ill...

as the poet said of the soldiers of the Great Epoch. Napoleon won his battles through the marching powers of his men. How describe the battle fought from Belgium to Champagne? The British Field-Marshal wrote : « From Sunday, August 23rd, that is to say from Mons back almost to the Seine, and from the Seine to the Aisne, the Army under my command has been ceaselessly engaged without one single day's halt or rest of any kind... » It was the same with five sixth's of Joffre's armies. The descendants of the soldiers of the Great Army won the battle also « through their marching powers », but even these did not march as our men did. « Our shoes stuck to our feet with blood », said one man, « the skin was all torn from the soles of our feet », said another. They marched under a torrid sky, on scorching roads, parched and suffocated with dust. In reality they moved with their hearts rather than with their legs. According to Pierre

Lasserre's happy expression « our bodies had beaten a retreat but not our hearts ». During the retirement they certainly looked gloomy and weary, Frenchmen do not like falling back, even « strategically ». Gaiety was not demanded of them, they knew that on their superhuman effort lay the safety or the ruin of their country. But when, worn out with fatigue, faces black with powder, eyes blinded by the chalk of Champagne, bleeding feet, almost, « dying » as one soldier put it, they learnt Joffre's order announcing the offensive, then the faces of our troops from Paris to Verdun beamed with joy. The French love an attack for it means bayonet charges and shells sweeping the plain! They fought with tired limbs and yet no army ever showed such muscle, for their hearts were filled with faith and hope.

It is certain that von Klück was wrong in ignoring and underestimating Maunoury and it is possible that such and such a German General will one day or other be accused of mistakes that will explain the loss of a battle already gravely compromised. But seeing that Germany has not, as yet, been severe on those Generals we may believe she herself realized that the adversary was too strong, with wise leaders and brave soldiers. I know that Germany attempted for some time to childishly or audaciously deny the very fact of a battle having taken place — but I will not indulge in the easy task of reproducing here the savoury *communiqués* whereby she sought to hide a notorious defeat. But if she had spoken the truth her shame would have been all the greater. For the « incomparable army » which set forth to battle, bragging and boasting, would have beaten a complete retreat before the threats of a French General! The truth was that the Germans were compelled to retreat in order to avoid a greater disaster, a disaster without precedent in History, since a million Germans would have succumbed. But after having lost more men than they took from us at Sedan, they can

offer to our most indulgent eyes, but one merit : that of having been *prudent* in a defeat inflicted by exhausted victors.

It is difficult to estimate the casualities. They have been evaluated at 135 000 to 150 000 men. I cannot adopt this figure — as historian I shall await the avowal which will not be made till long after the end of the war. But according to a table, fragmentary alas ! that I have before me, and which has been made out not from the statements of prisoners who are somewhat given to exaggerating, but from diaries and papers seized, it would seem that such and such a regiment (the XV) lost 1 786 men, whereas another, the III Guards, suffered so heavily that one of the companies (according to Sergeant-Major Docht) was reduced to 70 men, and another (according to the non-commisioned officer Brehm) was reduced to 80, that a captain of the Ist Grenadiers had but 85 men under his command — there are many more figures as edifying. Will the figure 150 000 be reached or exceeded? Anyhow the generals of William II brought back to the Aisne an army cruelly reduced and far more demoralised than was at first supposed.

It must have been so, otherwise how can we explain that feverish haste to reach safety and abandon all plans after so much presumption. They had marched forward with cries of « *Nach Paris!* » and were so certain of taking Verdun that prisoners whom I saw being examined before Verdun itself in October, maintained against all evidence that the town was theirs ! They had prepared postcards dated from Verdun as they had done for Paris. And many could have piteously cried, like that soldier who was heard by a witness, « *Plus Paris!* » for they had to give up Verdun as well as Paris. Was this then a semi defeat or even a simple falling-back both intentional and directed? The fact remains that they lost ground more and more. Retreating 37, 43, even 50 miles in three days, they abandoned two-thirds of their booty. In the evening of September 5th,

the Germans occupy entirely, or partly an area of ten to eleven of our departments and are settled there as masters. On the evening of the 13th, they occupy one-third of the ground they recently invaded. What army without suffering the weight of a crushing defeat ever evacuated as rapidly and abandoned two-thirds of its spoil and conquests? And of what consequence their denials? We have the plain facts : eight French departments freed from the German yoke while an army of more than a million men retreats in sorry plight.

Historic consequences

But the immediate results, great though they be, are secondary compared with the historic consequences of the victory of the Marne.

« *To act with rapidity is Germany's trump card,* » von Jagow told Sir Edward Goschen. This saying must not be lost sight of, everything went to confirm it ; Germany had in reality but that one ressource before a coalition which menaced her on every side but whom in her pride she did not fear. Promptitude was essential to her victory. Russia would not be ready for two months. The bulk of Germany's forces should therefore be thrown on France in order that she might be crushed by a swift blow before the expiration of those two months. The surprise occasioned by German troops passing through Belgium would allow of this plan being realised. It was so patent that for once Germany did not dare to deny it. Her leaders thought they could reach Paris and possess the whole of France between the Somme and the Loire by the end of September. The dream would assuredly have come true had the French army been crushed between the 5th and the 10th, or even dislocated in its line of battle. There would still have remained Castlenau and Dubail's armies to attack in another direction, and there might have been combats for a few months with the bulk of the French army, more or less reinforced at the rear. But if the line of resistance formed on September 5th from the Ourcq to the Ornain had given way, then the invaders would have rushed through with a strength increased tenfold by

the intoxicating prospect of victory. Then Germany, even if France had refused to submit to her rule, could have turned the bulk of her forces against Russia and obliged the latter to make peace and the campaign would have ended in a few months to the greater glory of the greatest Germany.

From the 7th to the 10th September however, the Germans instead of conquering, were conquered, instead of advancing, were compelled to retreat. Moreover their defeat stupefied them and seemed not only to upset their plans but to shake their confidence. The High Command renounced all those magnificent operations which they had thought would be child's play. Trench warfare was inaugurated and history will one day show how, by inaugurating it, Germany aided us more than she aided herself. Once the magnificent effort of the Marne accomplished, we needed a wall between us and the enemy, even more than he did, behind which we could prepare for further struggles. It was of course a bitter trial that this wall should be erected on our own territory. But the fact remains that the defeat of the Germans on the Marne had in some way brought the invasion to a standstill.

Two years have gone by. Germany has been successful here and there, she has won battles, yet no Germans have ever again crossed the line where they were hurled back after the Marne. These two years of war are the justification of our first victory, none of the belligerent powers had foreseen, and admitted, that things would be so, except Germany, who had foreseen them and has not taken pleasure therein. The Germans have struggled to obtain favourable positions with the remnants of their dream, but that dream was very much shattered in September 1914.

* * *

Thus the tide of the great war was turned during the battle of the Marne and, with it, the destiny of the world.

What would Germany's victory have brought us? I do not intend to start a controversy. I shall merely keep to the enemy's admissions, to his statements before and during the war. It was not enough for Germany to vent her hatred and envy on the Latin and Slavonic races. We were no longer on the brink of one of those conflicts from which one nation comes forth increased and the other diminished. We were face to face with an attempt, offering every chance of success, to establish in Europe and even in the entire universe, not only the political and economic hegemony of a nation, but the domination of a race, and still worse, of a Culture. According to Germany's scholars, statesmen, professors, generals, princes and priests, everyone ought to bend low before the rare perfection of such a Culture! The sword of the soldier was to make the brandishing of the rod easier for the pedant. And Europe, vanquished, was to accept what is worse than the tyranny of man : the tyranny of the pedant supported by soldiers and if need be, by the executioner.

Events have indeed proved what that famous Culture means : many of us who saw it at close quarters, especially in Alsace-Lorraine where it sprang up against Latin-Celtic civilisation, knew what Barbarism lay hidden underneath. Just as the spirit of Walhalla had remained alive generating gross brutality under an appearance of Christianity and even of piety, so the Prussian spirit had awakened everywhere the barbarity of the ancient Germans. Neither science nor religion had developed in these minds feelings of justice or goodness. And when, in the very earliest days of the war, the exploits of Attila's Huns and Genseric's Vandals were repeated, merely aided by science, the bleeding victims who rose up from the ruins to protest, found themselves face to face with the scholars, artists, writers, professors and priests of *Kultur* who put them to silence. The horrible doctrine of « necessary » destruction and « necessary » massacre was taught

in the Universities and even in the churches of Germany. Thus even before they could impose their laws upon us, the mask fell from those superior beings who had intended to « civilise » us.

The entire world soon learnt from what peril it had escaped : the most delicate of civilisations under the pretext of culture to be crushed by the heavy load of Germanism, human personality oppressed by the most despotic of tyrannies, that is an intellectual and moral tyranny abetted by militarism. I wonder whether the Barbarians who in the 4th century of our era, destroyed Greek and Latin civilisation in the west, imposed a worse yoke on the vanquished, or whether the Saracens and Turks who in the 7th century menaced the Occident and in the 15th century invaded the East, were even more cruel? If we allow that the Battle of the Marne checked the German invasion and put a limit, anyhow in the West, to the power which has been developing for fifty years at the expense of us all, then we must also admit that this battle should be placed on a level with those which I recalled at the beginning of this work. It is interesting to note that humanity rose twice against Barbarism on the same battle fields of Champagne. For it was on the Catalaunian Flats where formerly Attila was brought to destruction, that the hordes of a second Attila, contrary to their expectations, and those of the Universe, were also routed and repulsed.

* * *

If we wish to compare these latter days with the great movements in our past history, it is sufficient to state that they marked the awakening of France.

I was shut up in the semi-invested camp of Verdun when the battle was raging. From Fort Douaumont, now famous, (and a marvellous observation tower where, on clear days the eye can stretch from Montfaucon to Etain and beyond

it), I saw part of Sarrail's Army advancing on our left from Spincourt to Consenvoye, from Consenvoye to the slopes of the Argonne. Quivering with anguish and hope, we spent the day listening to the guns which becoming dimmer and dimmer were our only indication that the retreat was continuing. And then a great silence fell over us, for after all the banks of the Meuse are a long way from the fields of the Marne, it lasted until the bombardment of Fort Troyon and Génicourt, when the circle seemed to close in upon us again.

I distinctly remember being conscious, all the time, of an unreserved and unshakable faith in our destiny. This seems surprising to-day though events have entirely justified it. Mine was not an implicit child-like faith and I was helped by no feeling of mysticism. It sprang and was nourished from the history of our past. Evoking the memory of so many precedents, of those national awakenings in France which had so utterly disconcerted our enemies and caused ignorant people to proclaim a miracle, I felt quite sure that the French Nation, always the same at heart, was once more going to astonish the world by one of those marvellous *recoveries* which for nearly ten centuries, if I may so express it, have been customary to it. When on September 13th, in the dark casemate where for seven days we worked cut off from outside news yet full of confidence in our fate, when suddenly we heard the telephonists near us repeat in semi-ecstacy words which, fell from the Eiffel Tower, telling the world of our great victory, we were overjoyed of course and fell upon one another's necks, but several of us said : « By Jove ! we expected as much ! » The French soldiers backing remarkable chiefs, had if you like, accomplished a miracle, but their usual miracle, the one which took place for the first time under the flag of Clovis, then under the oriflamme of Philip-Augustus at Bouvines, under the banner of Joan of Arc at Orléans, under the fleur de lys at Denain, under

the tricolour at Valmy and now once again at the battle of the Marne.

We have pointed out the immediate causes of the defeat, but there are, if I may so term it, time-honoured causes besides, for which we need none of the documents of either of the general Staffs. They are contained in the power of the spirit of France, her faith and her strength. Germany, blinded by the History falsified for her own particular uses, and thus deceived by her own lies, was in a great measure defeated because she undervalued us. France is never as great as in the hour when she seems at her lowest ebb. Our enemies must admit that to-day. Nothing would have been easier than to have realised this in September 1914 — it would have sufficed had they read five or six pages of French History.

On the eve of the battle of Bouvines, when for the first time France was gathering herself together to meet a German Emperor whose strength lay in the treachery of certain vassals and in the British alliance, everything seems lost. The nation is finding herself and when suddenly faced with invasion the different elements in the nation became welded together. We see for the first time the local militia forces join hands with the King's-men-at-arms and the knights banneret, while even the monks don helmet and mace to repulse the enemy.

The whole of France came together and it gave Philip confidence. « Children of Gaul, » he cried to his soldiers who had assembled from every part of the kingdom, and seized with pious emotion, he stretched out his hands and blessed them. They were ready to withstand the whole world. In the meanwhile, Othon, the Emperor, informed his troops that « Philip was defeated in advance ». Once the King taken prisoner, the kingdom would be divided and France would exist no more. The Emperor thought Philip was running away while in reality he was drawing him to the plain of Bouvines. Renaud de Bou-

logne protested vainly : « *It is a mistake to think they are put to flight, it will be imprudent to attack them in open country, you will find them ready and drawn up in battle array...* » (A wise counsellor perhaps whispered this in von Klück's ear.) And when by forced marches, « like hunters pursuing game, » as « if they were trying to rescue their prey » the Germans caught up the French, Othon stopped and exclaimed in amazement : « Why was I informed that the King was running away, that he would not dare to defend himself? I see before me his army arranged in perfect battle order quite ready for the attack. » And in the fields of Picardy on the evening of July 17th 1214, the Imperial army was completely routed, the Golden Eagle torn from the colossal battle chariot of the fleeing emperor and thrown at Philip's feet who was proclaimed Augustus. And the Capetian said laughingly to his soldiers, what our men could have said at the Marne : « We shall not see his face again to-day. »

Were we ever in such a bad way, however, as in 1429 when the King of England was established in Paris, and discord, confusion, civil quarrels, military disasters pervaded France — when the hunted Valois King was no more than « the King of Bourges »? But if a few grandees killed and betrayed one another, there still remained from hut to castle, the people of France. It was from the ranks of the people that Joan of Arc sprang. On May 8th, before Orléans, which had become the bastion of France, the young girl gives battle and checks the invader. The King is restored to power and crowned, the army recovers its faith, the nation is once again united and in a few years the territory of France is liberated. If, after the death of Joan, her work has continued, it is because she incarnated the genius of the nation in that terrible hour when it refused to die.

And without lingering over other awakenings, if we trace the line of our Marches in the East, we see, after Tolbiac and Bouvines, Denain and Valmy.

The Battle of Denain ! France is exausted and seemingly incapable of effort. Between menaced Flanders and Alsatia, conquests have been made. It is the unhappy end of a great reign. The Imperial army is threatening Paris; Landrecies is on the verge of being carried, « the only place left », « to protect the provinces and the capital of France wrote someone. The old King sends for Marshal Villars and entrusts him with his last remaining army. He has been advised to leave his capital and go to Blois : « Marshal, inform me should misfortune arise, and I will gather together all the men I have in Paris, and go to Péronne or Saint-Quentin and *perish with you or save the State.* » When a King of France speaks thus, the state must have fallen very low, but what spirit still remains in the race ! Prince Eugène, commanding the German forces, has taken Quesnoy which is connected with the camp of Denain by lines then already baptised by the Germans : « The Road to Paris, » The same extraordinary presumption, which ended however in their discomfiture on the 24th July 1712. For at the short battle of Denain, fate was conjured and victory returned to our flag.

And was not the battle of Valmy a still greater miracle? A nation in a state of anarchy, the old order of things overthrown and the new not yet established, an army which in the spring of 1792 shamefully flies before the Austrians, Europe conspiring against us, a Prussian army which has taken Longwy, and Verdun, forced its way into, Argonne, penetrated into Champagne, threatened Paris (from which the Government resolves to fly,) and then Danton sends Dumouriez instructions written in the style of a mad Jacobin — but the same instructions that Louis XIV sent Villars : The State must be saved. The State will be saved. For when the « cobbler's army » mocked at by Prussian and Austrian officers, presented a resolute front to the great Frederick's army, that was sufficient : Argonne, then Champagne, then Verdun, then

Longwy were abandoned by the Prussians and the hour approached when our soldiers were to be stationed in Brussels, Liege, Maintz and Francfort.

The word Miracle ! was pronounced at each one of these unexpected victories ! Miracle, so be it ! it is a great thing that the Spirit should breathe forth, but it is also necessary that it should meet with great qualities to reanimate it. These great qualities were not dead, neither on the eve of the battle of Bouvines, Orléans, nor of Denain, and Valmy.

They lived still on the eve of the Battle of the Marne, and that explains everything. We seemed to have fallen very low, foreigners deemed us lost ; France had forgotten her warlike virtues, the race was « frivolous », « corrupt », « decayed », our enemies vied with one another in proclaiming that we were a people weakened by quarrels, demoralised by pleasure, badly prepared for war, defeated in advance because of our lack of discipline, and for whom (as King Othon's soldiers did at Bouvines), « cords and straps might » be prepared. For the « incomparable » German Army strong in « courage » and in arms, was going to face the degenerate race. And foreigners, especially the Germans, became more and more confirmed in their mistaken belief. The latter engage battle sure of their triumph, faces glowing with an envy so soon to be satisfied, with a hatred already satisfied, since the French are beaten and retreat. Then the Generalissimo makes a sign, the battle-word is given : « To be slain rather than give way ! » A sacred tremor runs from the suburbs of Paris to the heights of the Vosges. The attack began on the 6th. On the 13th, the German army, repulsed after fierce fighting, has abandoned two-thirds of the territory it had invaded, and its final retreat is only a question of time.

Tolbiac, Poitiers, Bouvines, Orléans, Denain, Valmy, Fields of the Marne, everywhere the same miracle occurred. But what is the miracle that every two or three cen-

turies saves the nation, if not the quality of the character of a race? The quality of the race, its grit its stamina, at the moment when everything seems lost, is the principal force in our armies : it may be seen in the clear eye of our chiefs as well as in the soldiers ranged in battle order ; it ruled our plans and gave strength to our arms. It has been so throughout all time. It was the principal cause of the great German defeat on the plains of the Marne as it was the cause of all the defeats suffered by our enemies down all the ages. But because the powerful spirit of the French as at other critical moments, appeared suddenly magnified by extreme peril, and remained after the trial with a halo of glory, the Battle of the Marne, whatever our present or future successes may be, will stand for one of the most solemn hours in the history of France, — perhaps the most solemn, for it undoubtedly saved from the heaviest of all yokes, not only the nation but, humanity.

THE END

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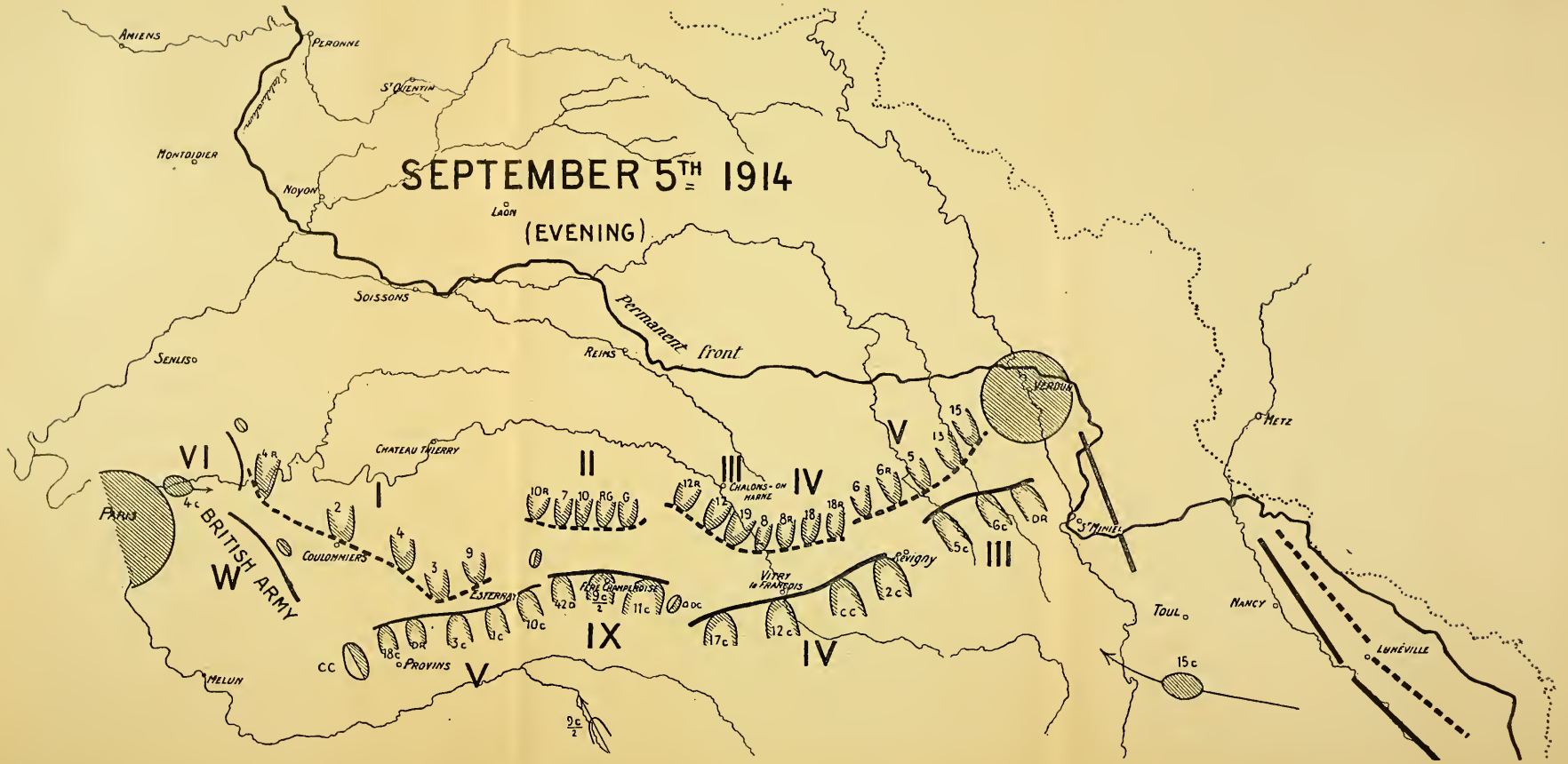
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